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SUBJECT: HIZB UT TAHRIR IN BANGLADESH: STILL NEW, STILL  
SMALL

REF: DHAKA 207

Summary

1. (SBU) Hizb-ut-Tahrir Bangladesh (HTB) was established in Dhaka in 2001 and has an estimated membership of about 3,000 young, well-educated, middle-class Bangladeshis, mostly from Dhaka. In common with the global HT movement, HTB claims to aspire to the establishment of a Muslim caliphate through non-violent means. HTB refuses to meet with American officers and rejects Bangladesh's democratic process. End summary.

HTB CHIEF: A UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOL PROFESSOR

2. (SBU) Although the Hizb-ut-Tahrir movement in Bangladesh (HTB) has consistently refused to meet with American officers, its leader, Mohiuddin Ahmed, agreed to meet with a Bangladeshi Locally Engaged Staff (LES) Embassy representative in Dhaka on April 6. According to the LES representative, Ahmed appeared to be between 35-40 years old, was well-dressed, personable, polite and seemed very well-educated. A professor at Dhaka University's Institute of Business Administration - the most prestigious business school in Bangladesh - Ahmed's official HTB title is "Chief Coordinator and Official Spokesman."

GOALS AND MEMBERSHIP

3. (U) The stated HTB goal, in common with that of the global Hizb-ut-Tahrir movement ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/hizb ut-tahrir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/hizb_ut-tahrir)), is the establishment, through non-violent means, of a Muslim caliphate, under which all Muslim countries could be united, Ahmed said. He said HTB (website: [www.khilafat.org](http://www.khilafat.org)), an autonomous offshoot of the global movement, was established in Dhaka in 2001 and since then it has been conducting outreach among young middle-class Bangladeshis and has grown considerably. Ahmed claimed current membership was 'about' 10,000. (Note: A local newspaper reporter who follows issues related to radical Islam estimated that its membership was currently closer to 3,000. The majority of the membership was in Dhaka, said the reporter, although it has some 50 to 60 members in the major cities of Sylhet and Chittagong. End note.)

4. (U) HTB's membership -- young, wealthy and well-educated -- is apparently drawn largely from Dhaka's private

universities (such as the prestigious North-South University and the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology), and a large percentage are graduates of Bangladesh's elite English-medium primary and secondary school system. Their outreach, educational and discussion seminars are reportedly well-presented and all held in English.

#### NO PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS

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15. (U) Ahmed said the organization began to call itself a political party in 2003. HTB did not officially register as a political party with the Elections Commission, however (Note: a legal prerequisite for participation in elections. End note). He asserted that such registration was irrelevant for HTB since it did not participate in elections. He added that elections in Bangladesh were a mockery, as no party could come to power without colluding with the US and other imperialist forces.

#### NO DIALOGUE WITH THE US AND OTHER IMPERIALISTS

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6.(SBU) The LES representative extended an invitation to dialogue with an American Embassy officer but Ahmed explicitly refused it, saying there was no point in dialogue with the US (and other imperialist forces), as they had "their own agenda" and the discussion would not be held on equal terms. Only after the establishment of the caliphate would dialogue - on equal terms - be welcome, he said. In addition, he said, the US was engaged in wars with Muslim countries and responsible for the deaths of millions of Muslims. No

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dialogue was possible until such activity ceased, he said. (Note: The HTB prohibition on talking to imperialistic foreigners seems to include India, with HTB leaflets commonly noting that 'Islamic rule is the only thing that can save Muslim society and Bangladesh from enemies such as India, the UK and the US.' In common with many Islamic groups in Bangladesh, HTB appears to view India as a greedy and single-minded hegemon determined to annex and exploit Bangladesh. End note.)

#### FUTURE PLANS

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17. (U) The strength of the movement would grow incrementally, one recruit at a time, until sufficient numbers of people were available to bring about a popular uprising that would result in the overthrow of the compromised and colluding elected government, said Ahmed. He recalled the 1990 popular uprising against then-President Ershad, who was forced to resign following massive popular demonstrations protesting his rule. Although elections, uncompromised by imperialist influence, would be held after the establishment of the caliphate, Ahmed said, HTB did not employ the Western terminology "democracy" since the tenets of Islam already provided for meaningful popular participation in and control of government.

#### FUNDING AND RELATIONS WITH OTHER ISLAMIST GROUPS

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18. (U) HTB is independent of any other Hizb-ut-Tahrir group internationally, and takes no orders or advice from anyone outside Bangladesh, said Ahmed, adding that HTB operations were privately financed by donations solely from its members and received no funding from external sources. HTB had good relations with Bangladesh's other Islamic parties, with the exception of Jamaat-e-Islami, which had, Ahmed said, compromised with Western imperialists by participating in elections and the democratic process. He added that HTB had no links to any illegal terrorist organizations such as Jamaat-al-Mujahideen Bangladesh and Harakat-al-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh.

HTB IN THE NEWS: SOME RECENT HEADLINES

18. (U) HTB has been embroiled in a controversy with the authorities since 27 HTB activists were arrested March 1 on charges of sedition. According to media, authorities detained the group in Dhaka while they were distributing leaflets implying the Awami League government had colluded with India to bring about the bloody February 25-26 border guard mutiny (reftel). On April 7, media reported that police used batons to break up a Dhaka street demonstration by about 300 HTB activists protesting the detentions.

19. (U) In January 2009, media reported that the women's wing of Hizb-ut-Tahrir held a seminar and a small street protest condemning Israeli military action in Gaza. The HTB women's wing is reportedly active and well-organized but run separately from the men's wing. In September 2008, media reported that about 10 HTB activists were arrested by police in the northern city of Rajshahi, just prior to holding a press conference there. They were later released without being charged.

COMMENT

11. (SBU) According to the Heritage Foundation (www.heritage.org), the HT movement has chapters in 40 countries around the world, including in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, with a 'hard-core' membership of 5,000 to 10,000, and hundreds of thousands more 'supporters.' It has been banned or outlawed in several countries. In Bangladesh, HTB is still relatively new on the scene and still a small organization. The secular Awami League's landslide election victory in the recent elections and the February 25-26 border guard mutiny upset dynamics and alliances within and between Bangladesh's Islamist parties and also unsettled Islamist relationships with the government. We will continue to observe with interest the

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trajectory and choices of Islamist groups such as HTB as those dynamics re-settle in the coming months.  
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